

Talk with your doctor before you start an exercise routine. Start slow, with easier activities such as walking at a normal pace or gardening. Work up to harder activities such as walking briskly or swimming. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week.

Where can I find help for coping with kidney failure?

When you start dialysis or are referred to a transplant center, you will meet many people who can help you. These people make up your health care team. Your health care team can help you with the emotional and physical problems and changes caused by kidney failure. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Talk with your family, friends, and health care team about your concerns.

Doctor. Your doctor can help you with many of the physical and emotional health problems caused by kidney failure. You will see your doctor often as you start dialysis or recover from transplant surgery. After a while, you will see your doctor regularly, though less often than at the beginning of treatment. If you have a transplant, you will see your doctor once or twice a month during the first 6 months after your transplant surgery. Then, if everything goes well with your new kidney, you only need to see your doctor once every 6 months.

Dialysis nurse. If you receive hemodialysis at a dialysis center, your dialysis nurse will oversee your treatment. The nurse will take your blood pressure, pulse, and temperature; watch your breathing; and explain your lab results. Your dialysis nurse will also make sure you are taking your medicines correctly and can help you find ways to lessen the side effects of dialysis. If you do home hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis, your dialysis nurse will teach you how to set up your treatment, take care of the equipment, and watch for infections or other problems.

Transplant coordinator. Transplant coordinators work with people who need a transplant. They are usually nurses with special training in transplantation. Your transplant coordinator guides you through the transplant process, from setting up your first physical exam and getting you on the kidney transplant waiting list to calling you when a matching kidney has been found and preparing you for transplant surgery. The transplant coordinator also works with you after transplant surgery by

- scheduling your follow-up care
- teaching you how to care for and protect your new kidney
- helping you find ways to cope with the side effects of medicines

Renal dietitian. Renal **dietitians** help you learn about your nutrition needs and why you must avoid or limit certain foods. A renal dietitian will help you plan healthy meals you will enjoy. See the section “Eating, Diet, and Nutrition” for more information about nutrition for people with kidney failure.

Renal social worker. Dialysis centers have a social worker, called a renal social worker, who works with people on dialysis or who have transplants. Your renal social worker can help you find answers to problems such as

- keeping a job or changing jobs
- getting help with financial issues
- finding services to help with transportation or chores around the house
- finding counseling services to deal with family or couples’ problems

Mental health counselor/psychiatrist. Your health care team may recommend you see a mental health counselor or a **psychiatrist**. A mental health counselor can help with depression and other mental health issues by talking with you and suggesting ways to deal with stress and unhealthy thoughts and behaviors. A psychiatrist is a doctor trained to help people with mental health issues such as depression and to prescribe medicines, if needed.

Family and friends. Your health care team members are not the only people who can help you cope with the problems and changes caused by kidney failure. Having a strong support system of family and friends can make it easier to deal with problems and life changes. Now is not the time to stop seeing your friends. Make a point to spend time with friends or keep in touch with them by phone or email. Attend social functions and community events.

You. You can improve the quality of your health care by letting your health care team know how you want to be treated. Don't hesitate to ask questions when your doctor or nurse tells you something you don't understand. Let your dialysis nurse know if you feel light-headed or sick to your stomach during dialysis. If you do home hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis, tell your dialysis nurse about any problems you have with equipment or supplies. If you have a transplant, talk with your transplant coordinator if your medicines cause digestion problems or other side effects. You are responsible for taking your medicines and keeping your appointments. Taking charge of your own medical care will help you feel more in control of your life.



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